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Some 21st Century Social Origins of Public Education Failure

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Some 21st Century Social Origins of Public Education Failure

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Abstract- During the 21 Century public education in the U.S.A. has become increasingly problematic. This effort will point to a variety of interrelated social factors figuring among: Social Class; English Language Acquisition parents' educational level, and parent involvement in their child's education. This effort also provides a unique socio/cultural percentage matrix for academic success within the public school sector.

I. OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

Social class is an important indicator of cultural capital for academic success (Bourdieu, P, 1977). Teachers expect a specific form of behavior which they believe supports learning. If the means of achieving this behavior is not located within the family's social/cultural resources, the child is likely not to comply with the expected learning behavior.

Therefore, distinctive cultural knowledge is transmitted by families of each social class. Children of the dominant class inherit substantially different cultural knowledge, skills, norms, styles of dress and linguistic abilities than children of those within subordinate classes. Consequently, educational institutions reward students from the dominant class background by virtue of a certain cultural competency established through the families rearing/ socialization process. Educational instructions similarly contribute to this reproduction process by designing and implementing curricula which rewards the cultural capital of the dominant class. Conversely, the public educational apparatus systemically and continually misunderstands the social/cultural capital of the many subordinate classes in the U.S.A. today, often leading to educational failure of these children.

Generally, it is common knowledge that both poor/working class and middle class parents want their children to succeed in school. However, the social position of each class leads its members to employ different means to this end. Poor/Working class parents depend on the teacher to educate their children (often because they are less educated than the teacher), assuming that the teacher is the only mediator of educational success. On the other hand, the middle class

educated parent tends to actively participate in the supervision and monitoring of his/her children school activities. Indeed, the middle class educated family assumes that if their child is failing in school, it is the fault of the teacher. Lamount/Lareau concluded that the educational values of both groups of parents did not differ. What did differ however was the manner in which they stressed academic success. The middle class educated parents viewed their child's education as a shared experience between teacher and parent. The poor/working class parents on the other hand, relinquished all responsibilities for their children's education to the teacher (Lamont, M. & Lareau A. 1988).

In 2009 a longitudinal study entitled "Long-term Effects of Parents' Education on Children's Education and Occupational Success" (Eric Dubow, Paul Boxer and L.Rowell Huesmann 2009) followed children from the of ages 8, 19, and 48 years old. These data suggested that the middle class parent's education and occupation had a profound influence on their child's educational and occupational trajectory. These children's I.Q., educational and occupational outcomes where all affected positively by the age of 48.

Data in yet another longitudinal study entitled "Fathers Education and a Function of Human Capital" suggested that Fathers' education and house hold income had a profound influence on graduation from a public urban technical college. If the father graduated from college, and the total house hold Income was 135,000.00 (in New York City) the student has a 25 % greater change of graduating from this college over those who did not have this family background(Gerardi,S. 2011).

Moreover, the so-called Boat People of Southeast Asian during the 1970's where poor, had no or little English experience, and live in urban settings; yet their children excelled in the public school systems around the U.S.A. According to Caplan, Choy and Whitmore this was the result of the family's culture and behavior in support of academic achievement for their children (Caplan, N, Choy, M, Whitmore, J. 1992).

Finally, the reading achievement gap among the families in the 90th income percentile of income have increased the reading gap almost 50%, during the 2000's over the 1950's. (Reardon, S. 2011).

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II. LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Basil Bernstein (1975) suggested that language, coding, curriculum and the transmission of knowledge is an important interpretation of Socio-economic Status in American society. Bernstein's concept of Code Theory is central to his analysis of the transmission of knowledge. Code refers to a social principle which underlies and defines the curriculum. Curriculum according to Bernstein is the "valid" knowledge transmitted via pedagogy. Both curriculum and the transmission of knowledge are located in language usage. Furthermore, language usage and interpretations are determined by class, hence acting as a function of social identification

Bernstein further suggested a distinction between language used by the poor/working class referred to as "public language," and the language-use of the middle class or "formal language." Bernstein argues that formal language has a greater number of possibilities due to the fact that it is more complex than "public language. Formal language permits higher order understanding by stressing the significance of concepts. Conversely, public language is limited in symbolic expression. It consists of words used as part of simple statements in the description of lower order concepts. Public language's emphasis is on emotion rather than logical implications. Therefore, formal language underlies the attitudes and values found within the educational setting.

Generally the use of public language is not a significant problem except in the superior/inferior relationship of teacher and student. Teachers in the school environment use formal language in the transmission of knowledge. Within the school environment public language users are often viewed as hostile, aggressive, and rude, further reflecting social class distinctions. The result may be a perception that the student is less intelligent. Essentially the breakdown of communication between teachers and the poor/ working class child may result in a learning resistance and the failure of the child. On the other hand, the language mode of the educated middle class background child is that same mode found in the educational setting foster academic success. Bernstein concludes, and this effort must also conclude that language affects the learning situation in the public school environment (Bernstein, Basil. 1975).

Hence, American Literacy problems are not the sole fault of the teacher; rather rooted in the parent's inability to promote positive literacy and linguistic interactions in the home. Moreover, the importance of the family mealtime (in the middle class family structure) where there is quality conversation during mealtime is a stronger predictor of how successful a child's language and literacy development will be later on in life. When educated parents have complex conversations, it provides the child with rich explanation, helping the children to contextualize the concepts. Furthermore, dynamic

language used at home also is correlated to the child's success and ability to move up in the social class of society (Dickerson & Tabor, 2001).

At the foundation of socio-cultural contexts, students' family related factors are regarded as the most powerful external factors on the development of students' academic achievement. Therefore, parental influences, such as expectations and involvement, consistently promote students' academic.

This further emphasizes that the social origins of parents are actively involved with their child's education has a profound influence on academic success. T-score data in a study entitled "Sociocultural Approach on Mathematical Learning Difficulties" (suggested that: 1) the father's language and education is correlated to the children's mathematical skills, 2) Mother's language use and education is correlated to children's linguistic expression, and 3) the father's language and educational level is correlated to children's task-orientation (Piia Vilenius-Tuohima, 2005).

III. DISCUSSION

This effort converted all significant T=scores (found in the above cited studies) into percentages. The goal being to assess the impact of parents' social background on their children's educational and occupational trajectory as adults.

Based upon the T=Score conversions, if the parents are English proficient and have completed college or greater there is an 86 % greater chance of impacting positively their child's education and his/her occupation at the age of 46 year old.

Although this effort strongly suggested the importance of the middle class parent's education and occupation on their child's social and educational trajectory; the countervailing issue here is that the majority of the publicly educated students is from poor/working class backgrounds, often are not English proficient. Consequently, only 14% of these public school students have a chance (statistically) moving into a middle class trajectory in their within life-time.

Given these data there needs to be programs which press upon the parents the importance of taking an equal role with the teachers, in their child's education.

One such program is Dr. Joyce L. Epstein of the Center on schools, Family and community partnerships "National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement programs". This program has six types of parent involvement: **1) Parenting-** which supports the school environment; **2) Design strong school-to-home communication;** **3) volunteering of parents for help and support;** **4) Learning at Home-** provide information to parent on how to help their children to study and plan for college; **5) Decision Making-** include parents in school decisions; and **6) Collaborating Community-**

identify community resources that may improve life chances. By employing these 6 sample steps the class educational and career trajectory of the poor/working student may well be improved significantly.

IV. CONCLUSION

As this effect suggested, parents' Human Capital is an important resource for the social growth of the children. Indeed, James Coleman referred to this concept (within education) as Social Capital. Social capital is a set of skill-sets, experiences, and knowledge that are found in family life which contributes to the child's social and academic growth increasing the child's social and occupational trajectory as adults (Coleman, J. & Hoffer, T. 1965, *Public and Private Schools*, New York: Basic Books).

To sum up, this effort suggested that the family's social capital (Social Background) is more important than the quality of the school, the teacher's skills and the curriculum for educational success in the public school system of the U.S.A.

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